

An Ethiopian Heritage Exhibition of First Kind in London

The Ethiopian Heritage Promotion Association in the United Kingdom (EHPAUK) held a grand opening of exhibition on Thursday 27 July 2006 at Kafu Gallery, 26 West Bourne Grove, London W2 5AH. The exhibition remains open to the public for free until Sunday 30 July 2006. Every family should take and take their children to see the treasure.

Invited and present guests included delegates from the National Union of Teachers lead by Mr Steve Sinnot, General Secretary of NUT, Amnesty International, lead by Dr Martin Hill, representative National Lottery Heritage Fund, representatives of Evelyn Oldfield Research Centre and The British Museum. The surprise guest of the day was Ato Gemoraw Kassa, the General Secretary of Ethiopian Teachers Association, who made a stopover in London briefly to visit his family and colleagues on his way to Ethiopia after attending the ILO Conference in the Netherlands and Education International Conference in Switzerland.

Before the ribbon cutting ceremony, LM Abebaw Yigzaw made a historic speech, explaining the aims and objectives of the Ethiopian Heritage Promotion Association in the United Kingdom (EHPAUK) and paid tribute to those individuals who made that dream come true. He drew Ethiopia as a mosaic geographical features, natural history, cultural, social, religious and history. After capturing the imagination of the audience with beautiful narratives of all those things that would make Ethiopia great, among which her struggle to remain independent and her fight to free her fellow African counties from the yoke of colonialism, he touched on how proud Africans decided to let the Header Quarters of African Unity and Economic Commission for Africa be situated at the heartland of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa.



LM Abebaw Yigzaw addressing the guests

The unique place of Ethiopia in African history had long captivated the imagination of the learned people of the world. The home of Lucy or Dinqesh had stamped on the fact that Ethiopia is the home of the first man on planet Earth. The country is also known to be one of the ancient civilisations, with her own unique system of governance, script, style of

calligraphy, art, iconography, literature and music. She is proud of her 25 rock-hewn churches and historic stale. Ethiopia is a country with a long written history, ruled by 225 Emperors and Empresses who left chronicles behind for historians. Ethiopia has so many heritages to preserve and also share with the rest of the world.

LM Abebaw Yigzaw explained the aims and objectives of the Heritage as:

- Advancing the education of the public in all matters relating to the language, culture and religions of Ethiopia and the Ethiopian Diaspora in Britain thereby promoting good race relations.
- Preserving such heritage consisting of relics, artefacts and various other collections and put them on display through a range of methods including temporary exhibitions, presentations of cultural evens and venues and permanent shows in a museum or gallery.
- Recording, documenting and preserving the lives and experiences of Ethiopians in the Diaspora through photographs, audio-visual and other multimedia means thereby contributing towards the multicultural goals of the host society.

LM Abebaw said to achieve the above objectives, the EHPAUK would closely work with communities, schools, colleges, universities, museums, public libraries and other venues.

Paying tribute to the hardworking selfless individual, Ato Alebachew Dessalegn, the person who single handily collected all those Ethiopian relics and artefacts and other individuals who made the exhibition a reality LM Abegaw Yigzaw said:

"All what you see displayed today are collected by one individual, the coordinator, Mr Alebachew Desalegn, a very committed Ethiopian, who devoted himself for this noble mission. On behalf of the association and myself, I would like e to thank him very very much for his invaluable endeavour. May I also thank the Ethiopian Community in Britain and especially the director Ato Alemayehu Dessie who gives all round assistance to the association? If Ato Alemayehu was not able to properly plan and raise the fund, we would have not been able to achieve our objectives. I would very much like to thank Awards for All and the Heritage Lottery for their generous fund, the British Museum and the London Art Museum for their encouragements. The North London College for their continued help in organising a venue to display our mobile exhibition."

LM Abebaw Yigzaw called upon all those who could make the difference to help the ancient and historical country, Ethiopia, to the service her cultural integrity. He said the association needed their moral and material assistance to promote Ethiopian heritage.

And then LM Abebaw Yigzaw called upon the guest of honour of the day to officially open the exhibition.

As Ato Gemoraw Kassa walked to the ribbon, people were so amazed and exited to see him, because few were aware of his presence in London, leave alone in that hall. After a bit of silence, they greeted him with applaud. Gemoraw was one most loved and respected fellow Ethiopian who lived in London in exile for almost eight years and now returned to Ethiopia to protect the ETA.

Ato Gemoraw stepped on the speech platform and beaming with joy to see the invited guests of honour and his compatriots in London whom he lead to so many vigils and demonstration, before his return home. After ceremoniously cutting the ribbon heralding the official opening of the exhibition, Ato Gemoraw made an emotional speech, which was listened to letter with utmost silence and attention.



Ato Gemoraw Kassa, the ETA General Secretary addressing the guests.

The leader of Ethiopian Teachers Association thanked the organisers for the exhibition of those priceless collections of Ato Alebachew Dessalegn. He also expressed he felt honoured to be asked to open the exhibition. He explained how heritage signified culture, property and characteristics of past times, inherited from ancestors, from earlier generations of a nation. It included places, objects and indigenous languages that had aesthetic, historic, scientific or social significance or other special value for future generations as well as for the community. In his speech, the General Secretary seized upon the relationship between heritage and education by saying:

“All these elements and concepts are foundation to education and manifestation of civilization. They are sources of self-assertiveness and wisdom bridging gaps amongst past and present generations. They serve to keep diversified social elements in harmony; among other things, cultural, geographical, colour and age differences or conflict of interests. Thus heritage of every society deserves proper recognition, appreciation and preservation primarily by its own people with an aim to be grateful to the past generation and make the future more successful in life. A person who knows his environment, who appreciates his/her own culture and who is proud of his/her history would be able to be a man of integrity who can accept and be accepted by the community.”

The ETA General Secretary spiced his beautiful speech by the famous quotation taken from the late Emperor of Ethiopia, His Imperial Majesty, Haileselassie I, as a Regent Ras Teferi Mekeonnen in 1927:

“Anyone of us who proposes to study foreign knowledge without being versed in the learning of our country is like a man who builds a house on loose gravel.”

With the above quotation, the ETA General Secretary Gemoraw Kassa expressed his strong belief that the Ethiopian Heritage Development Association in the UK would successfully carry out the above task and concluded his speech.

After the speeches, again LM Abebaw Yigzaw took out his pointer from his pocket and engaged himself to the business of explaining the displayed Ethiopian relics, artefacts, old coins, currency notes, stamps, drawings, ancient branna books, processional and handheld crosses, medallions and decorations from the time of Emperor Menilik to this day, swords, shields and Emperor Menilik time French and Italian beautifully illustrated historical issues of newspapers, such as Le Monde, and many other precious items. Among the displayed items, for example, there was a currency note of Bank of Abyssinia from Emperor Menilik’s time, which Ato Alebachew bought for £1,600.



Steve Sinnot, the General Secretary and Samidha Garg Principal Officer of NUT attentively listened to LM Abebaw Yigzaw’s explanations

Ato Alebachew’s devotion to rescuing Ethiopian relics and artefacts is beyond anyone’s imagination. Ato Alebachew's monthly earning when he bought most of the artefacts was hard to believe. He could go for days without eating if he needed, whenever Ethiopian valuable pieces of history are auctioned at e-bay or anywhere. He couldn’t stop talking about it. He wouldn’t sleep until he brought those artefacts home. Thanks to those who saw him toiling day and night exposing his family and himself to starvation, appreciated him for his determination and guided him to where funds could be secured. Now, the association is up and running, probably it can afford to rescue more Ethiopian historical treasures without exposing the family members of Ato Alebachew going empty stomach. Ato Alebachew is married with two children. Those who knew him well and visited his home would tell a story. Alebachew lives and breathes daily on the dream of recovering Ethiopians lost treasures.

Alebachew is not just about collecting artefacts but the most kind hearted person, who toiled up and down to help great people of our time, such as Laureate Tsegaye Gebremedhin, Artist Tilahun Gessese and now imprisoned political leaders and the unfortunate jailed journalists in Ethiopia. Alebachew is one of those who never lived for himself but for Ethiopia. He is a qualified journalist, a member of NUT but at times difficult where to classify him. One wonders, when would Alebachew start living for himself.



LM Abebaw Yigzaw proudly shows some of the ancient medallions and decorations of Ethiopia to Martin and Dawn Hill and a colleague from the Amnesty International.

The EHPAUK did not only provide ancient manuscripts, old gold coins, old branna books of Ethiopia. The association had also generously offered its guests with delicious Ethiopians traditional food, bottles of Ethiopian beer - Kidus Giorgis and Bati. The People stayed there until late in the evening eating injera and wot, and drinking beer.



Guests gazing captivated by the beauty



Steve Sinnot closely examines old pictures of Adwa victors.

In concluding this report, it is fitting to recommend to every Ethiopian and all friends of Ethiopia not to miss this exhibition while it is still in display in London. Grown ups as well as the children would enjoy and cherish their heritage. It is highly recommended that other cities must invite Alebachew as there could be nothing that would please him more than showing off proudly his rescued Ethiopian heritage.

More information about The EHPAUK can be obtained either by calling 44 (0) 207 722 1026 land line, or 44 (0) 7888 871 512. If one prefers communication by e-mail, they can be reached at etheritage@yahoo.com.

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